

## ISAF AND AFGHANISTAN: THE IMPACT OF FAILURE ON NATO'S FUTURE

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## **ABSTRACT**

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## ISAF AND AFGHANISTAN: THE IMPACT OF FAILURE ON NATO'S FUTURE.

There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.<sup>1</sup>

—Winston Churchill

Alliances are difficult. They are an imperfect form of collective statecraft that often directly affect the security and well-being of the vast majority of the world's population. Although specific alliances often morph or fail, the practice of alliance continues to persist. In fact, alliances have been alive and well at least since the Delian League in Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. There has always been a need and reason to form one.<sup>2</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is no exception. Signed on 4 April, 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty was “conceived in fear and born in a fatigued Europe”<sup>3</sup> and has survived for over 60 years. Since inception, its membership has grown, its focus has transformed, and its reason for existing has come under intense assault. Yet it still exists.

More recently and under United Nations (UN) mandate, NATO has assumed leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan with a charter that includes providing security, governance, and reconstruction and development.<sup>4</sup> This was NATO's first “out of area” mission and the stakes were (and still are) high. Many international scholars, leaders, and diplomats claim that ISAF is on shaky ground and if it fails in Afghanistan, NATO may suffer a fatal blow from which it cannot recover. On balance, however, and despite its imperfections and occasional inefficiency, this paper asserts that NATO will survive even if ISAF fails. Although aspects will be mentioned, the focus of this paper is not an examination of ISAF's

operations per se, but rather the persistent resiliency of an imperfect NATO alliance. In the end, the members simply have more to lose than to gain by allowing NATO to disintegrate.

### NATO's Resiliency after the Cold War

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many understandably questioned the need for NATO. After all, history tends to show that alliances form against threats, and when the threat disappears, the alliance often does as well.<sup>5</sup> The U.S.-Soviet alliance in World War II is one example. There was also a “peace dividend” to be had. The Cold War was immensely expensive for the stakeholders. Now that it was over, there was widespread sentiment on both sides of the Atlantic to reduce defense spending. Indeed, many in the U.S. Congress pressured President George H.W. Bush to seriously consider disbanding NATO and reduce the large U.S. debt that had accumulated in the 1980s due to a large extent to military expenditures.<sup>6</sup> Even in Europe, ground zero for NATO's original purpose, many voices wanted to escape American dominance and looked for ways that the European Union (EU) could supplant NATO politically and militarily.<sup>7</sup> Hence, why would NATO be different enough to defy the trends of history?

Several factors were at work that helped preserve the alliance just after the end of the Cold War. First, the elimination of the Warsaw Pact created a large power vacuum in central and eastern Europe. Furthermore, nobody could really predict the intentions of the “new” Russia especially considering how it historically treated its “near abroad.” President George H.W. Bush's administration recognized this problem and, with strong Western European support, began to strengthen political and military ties with the newly independent Central and East European states. His policy goal was to

foster a Europe “whole and free” and NATO was the catalyst.<sup>8</sup> Another factor was a moral one. Some said the U.S. “owed” NATO membership to the former Warsaw Pact nations for the “sell-out” at Yalta in 1944.<sup>9</sup> To them, it was simply the right thing to do.

Initial NATO transformation was slow and laborious. Shifting focus, policy, procurement, and training programs from a known 40-year threat to a new and ambiguous environment would take time. NATO needed a problem to solve to remind the doubters of its worth and to prove its resiliency. It got two, both in the 1990s: Bosnia and Kosovo. Bosnia was an ethno-political mess; not something America was eager to jump into. The United States had just completed Desert Storm, had a huge debt, largely wanted to enjoy the aforementioned “peace dividend,” and was reducing its military footprint in Europe.<sup>10</sup> The dominant U.S. policy position was that the Europeans would have to solve it. But after three years and as the conflict turned to ethnic cleansing, pressure mounted. Although the United States did not want to get dragged into another Vietnam-like quagmire, it became evident that the Europeans would not be able to handle the issue alone. Further, this conflict showed that even with U.S. political support, NATO military operations were not going to happen without not only direct American involvement, but also American leadership.<sup>11</sup>

In the end, U.S. leadership and military involvement proved vital. The resulting Dayton Accords exposed just how vital the United States was to post-Cold War NATO.<sup>12</sup> Kosovo showed similar problems for NATO. With the United Nations unable to reach agreement in the Security Council, the task again fell on NATO to solve. Even with political consensus in the North Atlantic Council concerning what had to be done, bureaucratic hurdles inhibited efficiency during execution. For example, basic

conventional targeting of the enemy became, according to one observer, a comic exercise. Each target had to get the approval of every foreign nation involved prior to execution.<sup>13</sup> This is hardly the way the most capable security alliance in the world is expected to perform.

But one must remember that NATO is also a political alliance, one that requires consensus as a sine qua non for legitimacy. Furthermore, scar tissue from the Cold War remained: NATO still had a conventional high-intensity war mindset and, although all the stakeholders agreed transformation was needed, the alliance was not structurally prepared to conduct expeditionary operations, peacekeeping, or peace enforcement. Nevertheless, NATO successfully adapted in-stride to get a grip on both Bosnia and Kosovo, learned as an organization, and gradually improved effectiveness.<sup>14</sup> In fact, it can easily be argued that the crises in Bosnia and Kosovo helped save NATO in the otherwise uncertain 1990s.<sup>15</sup> NATO showed resilience under strain.

Aside from the significance of Bosnia and Kosovo, the debate over transformation added friction to the diplomatic, military, and bureaucratic machinery within NATO. Most of the stakeholders realized that the alliance had to change to meet the new realities of the post-Cold War world, but how, where, and why? As mentioned already, the “what” had largely been settled, at least in the decade after the Cold War; in some form, NATO was still the only guarantor of collective security for its members and it felt intuitively comforting to keep this arrangement. Others saw the new NATO as a very expensive enterprise in desperate search of a lasting threat. But that threat was neither in the trans-Atlantic nor European areas. As the debate intensified, cooler heads prevailed and realized that emerging threats to stability, such as humanitarian

crises and trans-national terrorism, can affect the West from a great distance.

Facilitated by modern technology and mass media, the world got smaller, and as a result, NATO would gradually have to go global. According to one expert, although NATO's core mission of collective security has not changed, the location has. NATO would have to become expeditionary.<sup>16</sup>

NATO survived the trials and turbulence of the post Cold War 1990s, expanded membership to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and, in 1999, delivered a new strategic concept for the use of NATO forces in contingencies outside of Europe.<sup>17</sup> This new concept included a deployable NATO Response Force (NRF) and the formation of a new expeditionary command and control headquarters similar in capability to a U.S. three-star joint forces land component command. Unfortunately, the events of the next decade would test the resiliency and coherence of NATO at levels never seen before.

### The Birth of ISAF

The attacks of 9/11 in the United States triggered a chain of events that inevitably and directly involved NATO. It seemed the tidy days of nation-state wars were over. Fighting trans-national terrorism required new thinking and new responses. By 2002, the American response to the events of 9/11 was clear and in progress. And for the first time in the history of NATO, the members unanimously invoked the core principle of the Alliance: Article V, which clearly states that an attack on one member shall be considered an attack on all and that each member nation has an obligation to assist the attacked member by any means possible.<sup>18</sup> While "by any means possible" deliberately affords maximum political and military flexibility to its members, the symbolism of this act showed true Alliance solidarity. Figuratively, NATO flexed its

collective muscle and showed resolve to aid its strongest, yet wounded member. But how long would this resolve last?

Conceived during the December, 2001 Bonn Conference and created on 20 December, 2001 by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1386, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was the United Nation's response to the situation in Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> Restricted to the capital Kabul, the intent was for ISAF to provide security to facilitate the progress of the nascent and fragile Afghan Transitional Authority and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).<sup>20</sup> Perhaps inevitably and due largely to the need to maintain relevance, NATO took over the mission on 11 August 2003.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously and particularly in the southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan, the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom conducted largely counter-terrorism operations.

While ISAF and OEF amicably coexisted, their operations were not well synchronized due to significant differences in purpose, geography, and technical incompatibility. But on the surface during these early days in theater, it did not seem to matter. Indeed, the United States initially resisted the idea of expanding ISAF's mandate beyond Kabul, a position that would later be problematic for U.S. pleas to increase NATO's mission in the country.<sup>22</sup> Also, many argue that the U.S. invasion of Iraq caused a hard split within NATO over Afghanistan and that nations such as France, Germany, and Turkey refused to offer more timely help to ISAF because of it.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the United States pursued its counter-terrorism (soon changing to counter-insurgency) mission with a coalition of the willing, largely absent NATO. But with the

unremitting gravitational pull of Iraq, America had to reconsider its Afghan policies. The United States needed more help.

That help came in late 2003 in the form of UNSCR 1510. This resolution permitted ISAF, under NATO command and control, to expand beyond Kabul. It also reaffirmed that ISAF's mission was operationally restricted to providing a secure environment so that the Afghan authorities and international organizations could continue to nation-build and strengthen the reach of the central government.<sup>24</sup> The differences in the OEF and ISAF missions were gradually becoming more salient. They would not be as thorny in the largely peaceful north but would, as we shall see, cause more serious issues as ISAF expanded to the south and east. To be fair, neither the UNSCR 1510 nor the ISAF mission statement specifically forbid NATO forces from conducting offensive combat operations. The wording simply had to remain vague enough for consensus passage and to allow national flexibility during execution. While ambiguity is frustrating to some, it is not unique to ISAF, NATO, or the UN. Alliances through history have had to deal with vague or diluted language as the price for consensus and legitimacy. Simply put, ISAF operates with a peace-enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that NATO was the executive agent spoke well for its legitimacy and resiliency.

ISAF's expansion in Afghanistan was a four-stage process that began in late 2003 and ended in October, 2006 when NATO completed its fourth and final stage of expansion into the eastern part of the country.<sup>26</sup> Like the south, this region was under U.S. control for the previous four years and was another hotbed of insurgent activity. Unlike the south, the east consisted almost exclusively of (and still remains) U.S.

forces. ISAF was now responsible for security in a country about the size of France with over 30 million people.<sup>27</sup> In addition to thousands of troops and commensurate equipment, ISAF was also responsible for the operation and effectiveness of 26 provincial reconstruction teams (PRT) scattered in key cities throughout Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> Staffed with varying mixes of civilian and military expertise, the PRTs continue to play a crucial role in extending the reach of the legitimate central government.

ISAF strength since 2006 has arguably been insufficient for the size of and mission in Afghanistan, whether conducting COIN or “providing security” or both. Since U.S. leadership has almost always been necessary for NATO operations and considering that the U.S. main effort since 2003 was Iraq, Afghanistan basically had to accept what was left over. These conditions might have given the Taliban some breathing room to accelerate their insurgency. Nevertheless, by August 2009, ISAF consisted of approximately 64,500 troops from 42 countries with all 28 NATO members providing the bulk of these forces.<sup>29</sup> Overall, ISAF’s performance in Afghanistan under NATO since 2003 has been decidedly mixed but impressive in several respects.

First, the fact that NATO has achieved consistent contributions from all of its members (some quite significant) during its first “out of area” operation is strong testament to the intrinsic value of the Alliance. Additionally and despite domestic resistance from many contributing nations’ electorates, NATO and ISAF have stayed the course in Afghanistan for over six years. Second, there have been a number of specific improvements to the security, governmental, economic, and daily life spheres in Afghanistan that are rightly attributed to ISAF’s presence and efforts. Starting at zero in 2002, the Afghan National Army (ANA) now numbers over 82,000 thanks to ISAF’s



training and mentoring and is increasingly taking the lead in the planning and execution of security operations and COIN even in the more contentious regions of the country.<sup>30</sup>

The ANA has also earned substantial levels of trust from the people.

ISAF and the ANA have secured several national and provincial elections and approximately 67 percent of Afghans polled believe that the central government presence in their local area is significant.<sup>31</sup> This speaks well of ISAF's commitment to facilitate a strong and legitimate central Afghan government. On the economic, educational, and health fronts, Afghanistan has experienced consistent growth in gross domestic product since 2001 and legitimate agricultural production has doubled in the same time frame.<sup>32</sup> ISAF has built or facilitated the construction of 3,500 schools allowing over seven million children, including two million girls, to receive a basic education. Additionally, ISAF has facilitated the construction of clinics and programs that today provide 85 percent of the population access to basic health care.<sup>33</sup> Finally, ISAF enjoys popular support; 70 percent of Afghans support its presence in their country.<sup>34</sup> This fact cannot be understated and by extension gives NATO excellent credibility as an alliance with a solid reputation and altruistic intentions.

#### ISAF and NATO under Pressure

If ISAF seems to be doing so well, then why do so many politicians, scholars, and pundits state otherwise? Many of these same voices further warn of deeper problems within ISAF that threaten the future of NATO itself. The well-worn NATO issue of burden sharing has surfaced again, but this time with military personnel actually dying. The lack of true unity of command and effort inside ISAF are thorny problems that create friction, especially when American-driven COIN efforts clash with the softer NATO-driven "provide security and stability." And finally, national caveats, a NATO

member's ability to select and decline from a menu of missions, seem to split ISAF into many hard to manage pieces. These issues put tremendous pressure on ISAF and in fact do paint a questionable future for it and the Alliance.

To most observers, the situation in Afghanistan is a classic insurgency led largely by the Taliban. Although many think victory via a stable Afghan government and barely capable Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is possible, almost everyone admits these conditions will take a long time to achieve. Afghan President Hamid Karzai admitted as much and added that widespread corruption, narco-dollars, and criminality inhibit the development of stable and legitimate institutions in his country.<sup>35</sup> These sentiments and a raw acknowledgement of the renewed potency of the Taliban's effectiveness were recently echoed by President Obama's Special Envoy to Afghanistan, Richard Holbrooke, and by ISAF's Commander, General Stan McChrystal.<sup>36</sup> For example, between 2005 and 2006, the number of suicide attacks by insurgents and terrorists went from 27 to 139, an increase of more than 400 percent; the use of improvised explosive devices more than doubled, from 783 to 1,677; and the number of armed attacks almost tripled, from 1,558 to 4,542.<sup>37</sup> Combined with an initially nonexistent and later weak U.S. and ISAF presence in the narco-fueled south, it is easy to see why one observer asks, "how could America's 'good war' have gotten so badly off track?"<sup>38</sup>

More recently, the Taliban have continued to press their insurgency. 2008 saw a 30 percent increase of Taliban attacks against ISAF and the ANSF, and this trend continued into 2009.<sup>39</sup> Pleas from President Karzai for more NATO troops have largely fallen on deaf ears. For example, his request for 3,500 more troops at the 2004 NATO

Istanbul Summit got him half as many and for less time.<sup>40</sup> This situation repeated itself several times until President Obama's pledge in December, 2009, to send significantly more forces to Afghanistan. This prompted additional, albeit smaller, troop increases from European NATO nations. The U.S. President's decision represents a change in emphasis, if not strategy, and was the result of a stark, candid, and comprehensive assessment by General McChrystal. His assessment underscored a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, a resilient and growing insurgency, and an urgent need to change to a strategy that focuses on the people, their security, and their political inclinations.<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, General McChrystal has "up-gunned" the ISAF mission statement. Apparently attempting to merge the more kinetic and COIN-focused former OEF mission with the necessarily vague and softer ISAF mission statement focused on "providing security and stability", the new ISAF mission statement includes, "ISAF...conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency..."<sup>42</sup> For NATO, this is a radical change; words matter. In no other NATO document related to ISAF will one find the word "insurgency" or "insurgent," or the intent to conduct operations against them. Instead, NATO widely uses the more imprecise "militant" and "security incident" instead of an insurgent attack. This should not be a surprise; as already stated, NATO technically operates under a UN Chapter VII peace enforcement mandate. The fact that the North Atlantic Council (NAC) allowed this new mission statement to stand might just be cosmetic; after all, contributing nations still have the ultimate "opt-out" card: the national caveat. As one expert noted, member nations no longer agree on NATO's mission in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

Others point to the chronic tension between Europe and the United States over what is viewed in much of Europe as largely an American problem rather than a NATO problem. These European NATO members want their troops to serve NATO, not the United States. To be fair, U.S. sentiment, by occasionally dismissing European contributions as useless, has not helped foster unity of effort either.<sup>44</sup> The most constructive and cerebral criticism comes from the current ISAF Commander himself, the man who has to make it work or fail trying. Due largely to differing national intentions as part of ISAF, General McChrystal noted that much of ISAF is not trained or equipped for COIN, several contributing nations should increase their tour lengths in order to develop meaningful relationships with the locals, and that unity of command and effort is needed for mission success.<sup>45</sup> The Taliban are paying attention and are aware of the fissures in the Alliance. According to some NATO and German officials, they have begun to specifically target German troops in the relatively safe north in an attempt to force Germany to quit and go home.<sup>46</sup>

Burden sharing is a fundamental requirement of a healthy alliance. All should sacrifice blood and treasure roughly equally in proportion to capability. This is not happening in ISAF. But cries of unequal burden sharing within NATO are certainly not new; even the Cold War saw this issue frequently. But in Afghanistan it is not just a matter of taxpayer burden but of real lives lost. Due largely to entrenched social and labor programs, many European governments have consistently evaded the defense-welfare trade-off by promising fair military contributions to NATO, but often failing to deliver. In effect, they could hide in the NATO security blanket and receive security on the cheap, knowing the United States, as the largest contributor by far, would eventually

ensure collective security.<sup>47</sup> For example, only five NATO nations currently meet or exceed NATO's two percent of GDP defense spending requirement: the United States, United Kingdom, France, Greece, and Bulgaria. The other 23 nations are below two percent, and some are significantly below.<sup>48</sup> This imbalance is not a new phenomenon, but has existed in one form or another for decades within NATO. Additionally, only about six percent of non-U.S. NATO troops (approximately 80,000) are trained and equipped for a deployment at any given time. When pressed, these governments often use the "soft power" alibi to try to compensate.<sup>49</sup> They either do not have the troops to send or do not want to send them.

The current imbalance has a political aspect as well: protest over the U.S. invasion of Iraq, which further threatens NATO's cohesion. According to the Spanish Foreign Minister, "the threat of mutual destruction during the Cold War had kept the boiling cauldron covered and the rifts hidden; Iraq blew the lid off to reveal all the fault lines in the Alliance."<sup>50</sup> According to other experts, this time it is not politics as usual. Many European nations have had enough of what they view as excessively aggressive and militant American unilateralism, especially in Iraq. As a result, U.S. pleas for help in Afghanistan have received a muted response. According to many, why should Europeans value an alliance that the Americans ignore when they choose? In particular, France's and Germany's political hostility over Iraq has seriously eroded trans-atlantic solidarity.<sup>51</sup>

And finally, the most visible expression of an ISAF member nation's will or intent is the use of national caveats. While some NATO nations, such as Germany and Italy, contribute significant numbers of troops to ISAF, giving a strong appearance of burden

sharing and solidarity, their troops are restricted to certain roles or geographic areas, or both. For example, the Germans refuse to execute offensive combat operations or deploy outside RC-North and the Turks will not deploy outside Kabul. Among others, and according to some experts, these specific caveats have poisoned ISAF.<sup>52</sup> General McChrystal has felt their deleterious effect on the ISAF mission and has addressed them by stating that some nations in ISAF are overly protective of their own forces, need to get out of their bases and armored vehicles, engage the people, and physically co-locate with the ANSF in order to be effective.<sup>53</sup>

Although some NATO nations are caveat free, the situation is dire enough for the U.S. Secretary of Defense to declare that national caveats have created a two-tiered alliance of those willing to sacrifice and fight and those who are not, creating a state of affairs that will “effectively destroy the Alliance.”<sup>54</sup> In addition to all of these problems within the Alliance, the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia has caused many European leaders and electorates to reconsider threats closer to home. They question the direct threat of the Taliban to Europe compared to an enigmatic and resurgent Russia.<sup>55</sup> While this sentiment may buoy the need for NATO in Europe, it does not help matters in Afghanistan.

#### Impact on NATO's Future if ISAF Fails

ISAF and NATO are clearly struggling with many issues, but does this mean that NATO, resilient and steadfast as it has proven through several crises up to this point, will effectively collapse if ISAF fails in Afghanistan? Some prominent leaders and experts invoke this possibility. According to Richard Holbrooke, “NATO’s future is on the line”<sup>56</sup> in Afghanistan. Others assert that NATO must remain expeditionary, implying

required success in Afghanistan, or seriously risk alliance-destroying U.S. disengagement.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, what is the incentive for America, considering its global security requirements, to remain in an alliance that lacks the will to tackle complex transnational security crises that also have at least an indirect impact on the security of Europe itself? If ISAF fails in Afghanistan, it will join the ranks of the British and the Soviets in the shameful bin of previous attempts to succeed by force in that country. More significantly, this outcome would bolster the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and encourage wider unrest in the Middle East. Furthermore, it will probably ensure that the United States will not rely on NATO in the future, in effect rendering it useless. Afghanistan may well be NATO's "do or die moment."<sup>58</sup> Even President Obama remarked recently that "NATO's credibility is at stake in Afghanistan."<sup>59</sup>

In the backdrop of the crisis in Afghanistan, the European Union is another possible threat to NATO's future. Several influential voices in Europe are calling for it to militarily replace NATO, freeing Europeans from what they see as American dominance in Europe and beyond. They are bitter about global "Americanization" and its attendant foreign policy, both of which are toxic to many Europeans.<sup>60</sup> During its 1999 Helsinki Summit, the European Union took the first steps towards independent collective security outside of NATO when the members agreed to form a 60,000-strong EU Multinational Corps.<sup>61</sup> But this corps remains on paper; it never materialized. In fact, and with required U.S. support, it would end up borrowing the troops from NATO if needed.<sup>62</sup> Simply put, the European Union is in fact not threatening to replace NATO. European taxpayers will not pay for it. And the United States is content with this position for it will

ensure U.S. influence, via NATO, in the affairs of Europe. A more cynical view is that NATO, with U.S. leadership, is in fact useful to the European Union. It will do all the dirty work in the world while the European Union retains the moral high ground of non-involvement plus the added bonus of security on the cheap.<sup>63</sup>

The question remains, if ISAF fails, will NATO go with it? Despite all the credible warnings by many respectable leaders, scholars, and observers, the answer is probably no. Not one NATO head of State or Foreign Minister, despite other grumblings, has suggested dissolving the alliance. NATO was, is, and will remain critical for transatlantic security and for other reasons. NATO is the only institution in the world with the experience, institutions, and capacity to not only handle large-scale security crises, but also act as a hub of a global web of cooperative security initiatives.<sup>64</sup> Despite the occasional rhetoric to the contrary, Europeans will continue to support NATO not only because of Russia in their peripheral vision, but also because continuing to play the “burden shifting” game gets them the best security at the cheapest price, far less than they would be forced to pay on their own.<sup>65</sup> They would rather tolerate an alliance with a hard to heel America than go it alone.

From the U.S. perspective, NATO is still very relevant and useful, despite the apparent unfair burdens on American troops and taxpayers. Not only is NATO still the best means for America to literally remain involved in the affairs of Europe, but it also “augments the global prestige, political influence, and military power of the United States.”<sup>66</sup> America cannot indefinitely solve the world’s problems alone. NATO brings international legitimacy, the kind that matters when the United States has to defend its global adventures to a skeptical world. Although at times relations are strained, the



United States and Europe are too tightly linked for the Alliance to dissolve. The political, economic, and cultural ties, cemented by shared values, will help hold NATO together.<sup>67</sup> Finally, if the threat of ISAF failure predicts the same for NATO, then why is NATO still growing? In 2009 alone, Croatia and Albania joined and France agreed to rejoin militarily.

### Conclusion

NATO has faced many challenges to its legitimacy and relevance since its inception and especially since the end of the Cold War. It has searched for and found new doctrines and strategic visions. It has at times been slow to react and clumsy in execution. Several have declared the Alliance hollow; others that the problems within ISAF and possible failure in Afghanistan will be the death knell for NATO. The issues of burden sharing, unity of effort, and national caveats (among others) are indeed serious and need to be addressed. They do threaten the cohesiveness and credibility of the Alliance. But these problems are not unique to the ISAF mission; to a lesser degree they existed in Bosnia and Kosovo. Burden sharing has been an issue practically since NATO's birth. Furthermore, one would be hard pressed to find any alliance in history that did not have unity of effort issues or restrictions placed on troops by their own nations, however slight. Sovereign nations have their own foreign policy goals and these matter.

If ISAF fails in Afghanistan, NATO will suffer a tremendous blow to its credibility, but one from which it will eventually recover. The United States would carry on the mission with a coalition of the willing and may not choose NATO as a partner for a while, but it would not disengage from NATO. Neither would Europe. There are other simmering global security concerns on the horizon that for several practical,

psychological, and economic reasons require a networked and experienced security structure with shared values. NATO is the only response. In the long run, the core members have much more to lose without NATO than they would gain by its demise.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Carlo D' Este, *Eisenhower: A Soldier's Life* (New York: Holt and Co., 2002), 693.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Deni, *Alliance Management and Maintenance: Restructuring NATO for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "An Agenda for NATO: Toward a Global Security Web," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 5 (Sep/Oct 2009): 2, in ProQuest (accessed October 27, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> *The ISAF Home Page*, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/our-mission/> (accessed December 16, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> James Goldgeiger, "NATO's Future: Facing Old Divisions and New Threats," *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 48, in ProQuest (accessed October 27, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Frank R. Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2008), 66-67.

<sup>7</sup> Charles A. Kupchan, "The Atlantic Order in Transition: The Nature of Change in US-European Relations," in *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, ed. Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), 118-119.

<sup>8</sup> Goldgeiger, "NATOs Future."

<sup>9</sup> Peter Duignan, *NATO: Its Past, Present, and Future* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institute Press, 2000), 72.

<sup>10</sup> After the Cold War, the U.S. gradually reduced its NATO troop strength in Europe from 325,000 to about 100,000. The commensurate policy changed from defense of Western Europe to "forward presence." See Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> William I. Hitchcock, "The Ghost of Crises Past: The Troubled Alliance in Historical Perspective," in *The End of the West? Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, ed. Jeffrey Anderson, G. John Ikenberry, and Thomas Risse (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), 69-71.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Medcalf, *Going Global or Going Nowhere? NATO's Role in Contemporary Security* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishers, 2008), 62-63.

<sup>13</sup> Sarwar A. Kashmeri, *America and Europe after 9/11 and Iraq: The Great Divide* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008), 55.

<sup>14</sup> Deni, *Alliance Management and Maintenance*, 65-66.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship*, 66.

<sup>16</sup> Kurt Volker, "The Bucharest Summit: NATO and the Future of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance," *Heritage Lectures*, no. 1082 (May 6, 2008): 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>18</sup> Goldgeiger, "NATO's Future."

<sup>19</sup> The United Nations, "UN Security Council Resolution 1386," 20 December 2001, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N01/708/55/PDF/N0170855.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed December 27, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> *The ISAF Home Page*, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/our-history/> (accessed December 16, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Barfield, "The Roots of Failure in Afghanistan," *Current History*, no. 107 (December 2008), in ProQuest (accessed October 27, 2009), and *The ISAF Home Page*, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/our-history/> (accessed December 16, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> The United Nations, "UN Security Council Resolution 1510," 13 October 2003, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/555/55/PDF/N0355555.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed December 27, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Role in Afghanistan," [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_8189.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm) (accessed November 17, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> *The ISAF Home Page*, <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/our-history/> (accessed December 16, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Barfield, *The Roots of Failure in Afghanistan*.

<sup>28</sup> The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Role in Afghanistan," [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_8189.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm) (accessed November 17, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Vincent Morelli and Paul Belkin, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 25, 2009), 1, [http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL33627\\_20090825.pdf](http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL33627_20090825.pdf) (accessed 8 December, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> As of 2008, the ANA took the lead in approximately 62 percent of all security operations nation-wide. See North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Afghanistan Report 2009,"

[http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/afghanistan\\_report\\_2009/afghanistan\\_report\\_2009\\_en.pdf](http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/afghanistan_report_2009/afghanistan_report_2009_en.pdf) (accessed December 28, 2009), 12-13.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 19. Data come from a BBC/ABC/ARD opinion poll.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 31, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>34</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Progress in Afghanistan," [http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/progress\\_afghanistan\\_2008.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/progress_afghanistan_2008.pdf) (accessed November 17, 2009), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Hamid Karzai, "Afghanistan's Challenges," *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly* (Spring/Summer 2009), in ProQuest (accessed October 27, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> See Richard Holbrooke, "Coordinated Support for Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly* (Spring/Summer 2009), in ProQuest (accessed October 27, 2009), and Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment* (Kabul, Afghanistan: HQ ISAF, August 30, 2009), 1-1.

<sup>37</sup> Barfield, *The Roots of Failure in Afghanistan*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Additionally, when the author was on his first tour in Afghanistan in the southern Kandahar Province from 2003-2004, there was almost no US presence in the poppy-rich provinces of Helmand, Uruzgan, and Nimroz.

<sup>39</sup> Morelli and Belkin, *NATO in Afghanistan*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Serfaty, *The Vital Partnership: Power and Order, America and Europe Beyond Iraq* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, 1-1, 1-3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 2-2.

<sup>43</sup> Azeem Ibrahim, "Testing the NATO Alliance: Afghanistan and the Future of Cooperation," *Harvard International Review* no. 31 (Summer 2009), in ProQuest (accessed October 27, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Anne Applebaum, "The Slowly Vanishing NATO," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2009, <http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20091020710933.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, 1-2, 2-1, 2-12.

<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Kulish, "German Limits on War Facing Afghan Reality," *New York Times*, October 27, 2009, <http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20091027712480.html> (accessed November 1, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Wallace J. Thies, *Friendly Rivals: Bargaining and Burden-Shifting in NATO* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 2003), 222-223.

<sup>48</sup> *The NATO Home Page*, <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2009/P09-009.pdf> (accessed December 4, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Simon Serfaty, *The Vital Partnership*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> From a personal interview by Kashmeri, *America and Europe After 9/11 and Iraq*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Kupchan, "The Atlantic Order in Transition," 122-124, and Dieter Mahncke, "Maintaining European Security: Issues, Interests, and Attitudes," in *Redefining Transatlantic Security Relations: the Challenge of Change* (Manchester, UK: Manchester Univ. Press, 2004), 19-20.

<sup>52</sup> See Medcalf, *Going Global or Going Nowhere?*, 182-184, and Morelli and Belkin, *NATO in Afghanistan*, 22, and Leo Michel and Robert Hunter, "Keeping Our Allies on Our Side," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 2009, <http://ebird.osd.mil/cgi-bin/ebird/displaydata.pl?Requested=/ebfiles/e20091027712532.html> (accessed November 1, 2009). As the ISAF Chief of Current Plans CJ35, the author was also the "keeper of the ISAF caveats" in 2006. Their impact was significant on the ability of the commander to conduct operations and advance the ISAF mission. Even more corrosive to the Alliance were the "hidden" caveats. These are not declared in advance but revealed at the owner's choosing, usually when the commander needs to shift forces from one area or activity to another.

<sup>53</sup> McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, 1-2, 2-12, 2-15.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Gates speech at the February 10, 2008 security policy conference in Munich. See Medcalf, *Going Global or Going Nowhere?*, 184.

<sup>55</sup> Morelli and Belkin, *NATO in Afghanistan*, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Holbrooke, "Coordinated Support for Afghanistan."

<sup>57</sup> Medcalf, *Going Global or Going Nowhere?*, 237.

<sup>58</sup> Kashmeri, *America and Europe*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Barack Obama, "Address to the Nation," West Point, NY, *Fox News*, December 1, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Allen G. Sens, "The Widening Atlantic, Part II: Transatlanticism, the New NATO, and Canada," in *NATO and European Security: Alliance Politics from the End of the Cold War to the Age of Terrorism*, eds. Alexander Moens, Leonard J. Cohen, and Allen G. Sens (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 22-23.

<sup>61</sup> Alexander Moens, "Thinking Outside the Box: NATO-ESDP Cooperation at Twenty-Three," in *NATO and European Security: Alliance Politics from the End of the Cold War to the Age of Terrorism*, eds. Alexander Moens, Leonard J. Cohen, and Allen G. Sens (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 71.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Thomas S. Mowle, *Allies at Odds? The US and the EU* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2004), 160-161.

<sup>64</sup> Brzezinsky, "An Agenda for NATO," 9.

<sup>65</sup> Thies, *Friendly Rivals*, 282.

<sup>66</sup> Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship*, 169.

<sup>67</sup> It is self evident that the US and Europe share the values of democracy, governments accountable to the people, and respect for human rights. Additionally, most Americans trace their blood lines to Europe. From an economic standpoint, over half of US corporate profits come from Europe. See Kashmeri, *America and Europe*, 28, and Thies, *Friendly Rivals*, 263.